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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 002061

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
NSC FOR DORMANDY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LTTE REJECTS NEW GSL PROPOSALS FOR PEACE TALKS

REF: COLOMBO 1920

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a December 27 conversation with Ambassador and U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations Professional Staff Member Tim Rieser, Secretary General of the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Peace Secretariat Jayantha Dhanapala explained the latest developments in the peace process with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The GSL, through Norwegian peace facilitators, sent the LTTE a proposal for resumed peace talks December 20. On December 24, Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim conveyed the LTTE's formal rejection of the proposal to Dhanapala. The Tigers were clearly unreceptive to the GSL's new proposals for peace talks. What remains unclear is if the LTTE disliked the new provisos the GSL added to a proposal containing a major GSL concession--the term Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA), or if the real problem is, as the LTTE implied, the President's inability to rein in her major coalition partner, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a December 27 meeting with Ambassador and U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations Professional Staff Member Tim Rieser, Secretary General of the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Peace Secretariat Jayantha Dhanapala summarized the state of play between the GSL and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Tigers, Dhanapala prefaced, want a detailed announcement of any agenda for talks based on its much-desired Internal Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal--and only after the ISGA is negotiated do the Tigers want to discuss the core issues of a political settlement. President Kumaratunga, he continued, is willing to negotiate on an interim authority, "but clearly not the ISGA." Dhanapala noted that after LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran's November 27 LTTE "Heroes' Day" speech (Reftel), Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim urged the GSL to "use the flexibility" in the Tiger leader's speech to move forward with a new proposal. (Note: In this speech, Prabhakaran said, "If some elements of our (ISGA) proposal are deemed problematic or controversial, these issues can be resolved through discussions at the negotiating table." End note.)

¶3. (C) Dhanapala reported that the Norwegians used one of their earlier draft proposals for talks (ostensibly approved by the LTTE in July 2004) as the base for the new GSL proposal. Despite his comment moments earlier that the President would not negotiate the Tigers' ISGA, Dhanapala confided to Ambassador that the December 20 proposal "actually said ISGA," but added provisos referencing Prabhakaran's more conciliatory language and noted that GSL responses "will be discussed and resolved at the table." Furthermore, Dhanapala explained, the President authorized him to submit the draft on behalf of the GSL without consulting her main coalition partner the Marxist Sinhalese chauvinist (and strongly anti-ISGA) Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

¶4. (C) According to pro-LTTE website TamilNet, Solheim gave the new GSL proposal to long-time LTTE political advisor Anton Balasingham in London on December 20. The Tigers publicly rejected the proposals December 24; Solheim conveyed the LTTE's formal rejection of the proposal to Dhanapala the same day. Dhanapala said he thought the LTTE's rejection of the proposal was odd, because it was a draft the LTTE had already approved. He said that Solheim told him that there "had been a lot of water under the bridge since July," and commented, "clearly they have changed the goal posts again." Dhanapala also conveyed frustration that the Norwegians had agreed to present to the LTTE a GSL desire for a reaffirmation of the Oslo Principle (shorthand for an agreement the previous government negotiated to make federalism the basis for a political solution to the conflict), but had not done so. After the fact, Solheim argued against presenting new proposals and a re-affirmation of Oslo at the same time. According to Dhanapala, Solheim wanted to present "one piece at a time," to the Tigers, and would present the whole package later. Dhanapala expressed frustration with Solheim's actions and said that the Norwegians have a proclivity for finding excuses for the Tigers.

15. (C) Although the GSL's proposals were forwarded to the Tigers without fanfare, the LTTE wasted no time publicizing its rejection of them. On December 24 pro-LTTE website TamilNet quoted Tiger ideologue Balasingham's response to Solheim, "The LTTE... is displeased with (the agenda's) structure and contents. Because of the vague and inconsistent attitude articulated by President Kumaratunga on the ISGA and the violent opposition expressed by her major ally and coalition partner, the JVP, the Tamil Tiger leaders insist on a clear, comprehensive agenda, instead of revising earlier formulations, definitely specifying that the Interim Self-Governing Authority, as proposed by the LTTE, shall be the basis for peace negotiations." Dhanapala said the Tigers conveyed the same stance in their communication to him.

16. (C) Comment: The Tigers were clearly unreceptive to the GSL's new proposals for peace talks. What remains unclear is if the LTTE disliked the new provisos the GSL added to a proposal containing a major GSL concession--the term ISGA--or if the real problem is the President's inability to rein in ongoing JVP opposition to a Tiger ISGA. The usually unflappable Dhanapala seemed particularly annoyed at the Norwegians and puzzled by LTTE rejection of proposals the GSL expected would be acceptable to them. End Comment.

17. (U) Tim Rieser did not have the opportunity to review this cable.

LUNSTEAD